

ADOT to discuss freeway's impact on wildlife

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The South Mountain Loop 202 study continues when the Citizens Advisory Team hears presentations Thursday on visual and biological impacts construction and operation of a 10-lane freeway might have along Pecos Road.

The meeting will be held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. April 17 in the student union at South Mountain Community College, 7050 S. 24th St.

Issues include what the Arizona Department of Transportation could do to help reduce the visual impact of the freeway from local residents, including the use of landscaping and construction. Draft materials released before the meeting didn't mention how the state plans to reduce the impact overpasses at 40th and 24th streets, and Desert Foothills Parkway, going over the freeway would have.

The draft material also says there are no major wildlife migration corridors that the freeway would block, but it does concede that wildlife and habitat could be degraded by construction and operation of the freeway.

It also suggests construction of wildlife crossing structures and special fencing could be built to protect wildlife and reduce roadkill.

The South Mountain Loop 202 was originally designed in 1985 to connect with Interstate 10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, head west along what is now Pecos Road, cut through two ridges in South Mountain Park and turn north to roughly follow 55th Avenue to reconnect with I-10.

In 2002, ADOT decided to update the plan to take into account growth and development along the original route.

The plan calls for the elimination of 317 homes in Ahwatukee Foothills, and the 2005 cost estimate has grown from \$1 billion to just over \$1.7 billion.

A draft environmental impact statement is under review by the Federal Highway Administration, and a final environmental impact statement is expected in the next 12 months.